

1959 ANNUAL REPORT
CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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The City Planning Department has completed its fourth full year as an active department in the city government. It is now appropriate to summarize in this annual report the important opportunities facing Lowell in the coming decade of the 60's and what our planning studies reveal should be done if Lowell is to make the most of the changes that could benefit the city in the years ahead.

Lowell is not unlike other old east coast cities in that its population is declining during a period of unprecedented national urban population growth. City records show that between 1950 and 1960, 14,574 persons moved out of Lowell. (See attached migration chart). By contrast to this, the five towns adjacent to Lowell gained 22,831 persons between 1950 and 1960, which is a 59% increase over the 38,738 persons living in these five towns in 1950. The City is losing an average of 1,457 persons per year while the five surrounding towns are gaining an average of 2,283 persons per year.

Planning Department studies show that in the coming decade the city population decline will level off and Lowell's population will stabilize between 90,000 and 95,000 people. The growth in Lowell suburbs will continue and in fact should increase its pace over the population boom of the 50's. A conservative estimate is that by 1970 there will be twice as many people living in the five surrounding towns as were living there only 10 years ago. The same proportionate growth will occur in the other towns comprising the Greater Lowell area (See attached population chart).

This population shift, although ostensibly a move from the city to country, is in fact a movement of people from one type of urban area to another type of urban area, and day by day the adjacent towns are losing their rural character and are being blended into one large built-up metropolitan city.

This shift outward is understandable when we consider that family incomes and living standards are rising and changing every year and that the 37,600 Lowell people living in varying degrees of sub-standard multiple dwellings (and almost 1/2 million in Boston core cities) are on the move to improved housing and neighborhood areas. What is not understandable to many is that the popular concept of suburban living is slowly and almost invisibly disappearing under this population shift while with the same creeping inevitability a giant metropolitan city is emerging.

Few people today can visualize or even care to think about what the large metropolitan City of Lowell will look like 20 or 30 years from now. Nevertheless, a few experts are forecasting that suburban towns will continue to grow without good planning and that in a few years people will want to move back to the old city center away from excessive suburban problems. Such a forecast is pure speculation, but the continued growth of Greater Lowell for at least another 10 years can hardly be disputed. By this time there will be about 1/2 million people living within a 15 minute drive of Lowell City Hall. The principal reason that good planning for this population group is difficult is the fact that these people live in parts of 2 states, 3 cities, 27 towns, 4 counties and 4 metropolitan areas.

Good regional or metropolitan planning for this area is nevertheless one of the most urgent needs of the area today.

What the City of Lowell will do to insure its future as the heart and center of this new population growth is yet to be decided. Although Lowell has taken broad steps towards modernization, the City should and can take new steps to guard against being left in the backwash of decentralized shopping centers, decentralized industry and be left licking the mortar of old buildings and congested neighborhoods.

There are approximately 1,200 sub-standard non-salvable residential structures in Lowell that occupy 130 acres of land. This represents about twice the land area now available in the Lowell Industrial Park for new plant development. There are an additional 3,390 sub-standard residential structures (many of which could be rehabilitated to present day standards) that occupy about 270 acres of city land.

This discussion of population change and sub-standard land use areas in Lowell is fundamental in describing the opportunities facing the city. Lowell's regional location on the rim of the Greater Boston area assures Greater Lowell of a continued suburban population growth, and this growing population is Lowell's greatest if not its only major asset on which it can strengthen and diversify its economic base.

Lowell's opportunity as the center of a fast growing metropolitan area can be stated as follows:

1. The City should undertake a renewal program that will convert about 60% of its blighted residential land to Industrial and commercial uses. This will help to restore the tax base of the city to a level more in line

with other progressive New England cities. New Haven, for example, is about 60% non-residential and 40% residential, while Lowell is only 30% non-residential and almost 70% residential. Clearing sub-standard areas for non-residential use should be Lowell's first priority in redevelopment projects to broaden its economic base.

2. About 40% of Lowell's sub-standard residential structures should be rehabilitated or the land cleared for new multi-family apartments. This residential renewal should only be undertaken on a large scale after the Industrial and commercial renewal programs are well under way.
3. This can be accomplished in time to be useful to the present generation only if Lowell undertakes a vastly expanded urban renewal program with a new Authority established solely for redevelopment and renewal work. At the present rate of redevelopment, that is, 10 acres in 5 years (Church Street Project converting blighted residential to commercial uses) it will take over 200 years to redevelop the existing 400 acres occupied by sub-standard dwellings. Long before that time arrives, a majority of the existing standard residential structures would have slipped into deterioration or obsolescence. In fact, only through a stepped-up renewal program will Lowell be able to keep pace with

the normal deterioration that time, weather and changing standards of living force on residential properties and neighborhoods.

4. In summary, Lowell must increase the tempo of renewal and redevelopment if it hopes to capture the benefits of its metropolitan location and serve as the industrial, financial and commercial hub of a rapidly growing Greater Lowell area. To capture the value of its greatest asset, a growing population, the City should set as its goal the renewal or redevelopment of at least 20 acres a year for the next 20 years. It is estimated that this can be accomplished for a cost of 30 million dollars in public funds and about \$50 million of private investment. Under existing federal aid formulas, the cost of such a complete program from city appropriations would be only 10 million dollars, or \$500,000 per year. (NOTE: Under pending state aid legislation this city cost would be reduced to \$250,000 per year). Actually, the \$500,000 per year city share would be more than off-set by the increased assessments from new buildings that would be erected in renewal areas. In other words, urban renewal more than pays for itself. It is regarded by many as the only program that can pump new life into the hearts of old cities.

II - This new opportunity for Lowell is also filled with many challenges, particularly the uncertainty as to who will take responsibility for getting the job done. Building a new city on open farm land is always easier than rebuilding a city that must be torn apart to make space for the new. Whereas one calls for merely the displacement of an old barn and the relocation of a few cows, the latter calls for the demolition of acres of buildings on literally thousands of small parcels, and the relocation of families and institutions with deep roots and traditions.

Successful renewal has proven to be a joint venture between the public authority that purchases and clears the land and the private interests that rebuild. Cities very successful in renewal have a third party, a citizens action group, acting as moderator between the public and private firms to see that the program keeps moving at the right pace and in the right direction. Such citizen participation has, in fact, become a requirement for federal aid for renewal programs.

Stating a problem is always easier than solving it. To say that Lowell has a rare opportunity in urban renewal is painting only half the picture. Clearing 20 acres of land a year for renewal is useless unless there is sufficient interest by private enterprise to rebuild on these 20 acres. Those most familiar with Lowell real estate trends since the textile depression began in the early 1920's are aware that (exclusive of public projects and expenditures) there was little incentive for private investment in new buildings of any type in Lowell

up to the opening of the Lowell Industrial Park seven years ago.

In the past five years, there has been a quickening pace in new building construction in the city. A large scale renewal program in Lowell would be a dismal flop without the experience and change of attitude in real estate investment of the past five years to lean on. The final sale of land in the Church Street redevelopment project and the construction of a new shopping center on this site should also help to subdue the old reluctance of local investors as to the potential for new construction in the city and the ability of tenants to pay rents that make new construction profitable. In this respect, the Church Street Project will be an important "first" for Lowell and should be a turning point in assuring the city's renewal team that both halves of the renewal picture can be painted.

For these and many other reasons, the concentrated efforts of the past seven years by the city government and those local business leaders who have shown a new faith in the business climate of the city was critical to the launching of a large scale renewal program. This first step, always the most difficult, has been taken successfully and the renewal baby is now standing and ready to run. The next step is to formally organize the public, the private, and the citizen renewal team to carry out renewal plans that only await this action.

With such a program, Lowell can look forward to a very prosperous decade and can move with confidence toward fulfilling

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the role the city must take as the vital heart of a growing metropolitan area.

Charles M. Zettek,
Planning Director

POPULATION INCREASE
GREATER LOWELL AREA

<u>Place</u>	<u>U.S. Census 1950 Population</u>	<u>Planning Dept. 1958 Estimate</u>	<u>GBESC* Jan. '59 Estimate</u>	<u>GBESC 1970 Est.</u>
LOWELL	97,249	94,500	94,500	94,500**
Billerica	11,101	16,694	16,700	23,200
Chelmsford	9,407	14,139	14,100	16,800
Dracut	8,666	13,099	13,100	15,000
Tewksbury	7,505	14,338	14,300	16,800
Tyngsboro	2,059	3,299	3,300	4,900
Wilmington	7,039	11,843	11,800	13,800
Burlington	3,250	9,758	9,800	13,500
Bedford	5,234	10,392	10,400	16,400
Concord	8,623	12,157	12,200	15,000
Carlisle	876	1,395	1,400	1,900
Acton	3,510	5,836	5,800	8,100
Westford	3,830	5,758	5,800	6,200
Littleton	2,349	4,282	4,400	4,900
Dunstable	522	760	800	1,200
Groton	2,889	3,974	4,000	4,500
Ayer	5,740	4,440	4,400	7,100
Pepperell	3,460	3,741	3,700**	4,000**
Shirley	4,271	3,022	3,000**	4,200**
Townsend	2,817	3,702	3,700**	4,800**
Total	190,397	237,129	237,200	276,800

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>10 Yr. % Inc.</u>	<u>GBESC Est. 1970</u>	<u>20 Yr. % Inc.</u>	<u>Numerical Increase</u>
BUREAU OF CENSUS LOWELL STANDARD METROPOLITAN AREA	135,987	156,000	15%	171,700	26%	35,713
GREATER LOWELL MARKET AREA	190,397	237,200	24%	277,300	45%	86,903

* Greater Boston Economic Study Committee

** Estimated by City Planning Department

LOWELL LABOR FORCE POPULATION
within 15 miles (20 minute drive) of Lowell

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Dunstable	522	800	1,200
Groton	2,889	4,000	4,500
Ayer	5,740	4,400	7,100
Pepperell	3,460	3,700**	4,000**
LAWRENCE	80,500	75,000	73,600
Andover	12,400	15,000	20,200
North Andover	8,500	10,000	11,200
Methuen	24,500	26,000	32,100
North Reading	4,400	7,000	9,700
Reading	14,000	18,000	22,400
NASHUA, N.H.	34,669	39,989*	45,000**
Hudson, N.H.	4,183	4,991*	6,000**
Pelham, N.H.	1,397	2,148*	3,000**
Salem, N.H.	4,805	6,927*	9,000**
Hollis, N.H.	1,196	1,611*	2,000**
Windham, N.H.	964	1,147*	1,500**
TOTAL	374,823	438,313	503,500

Note: The 1959 population estimates were made
by the Greater Boston Economic Study Committee.

* Estimated by New Hampshire State Planning
& Development Commission.

** Estimated by Lowell City Planning Department.